STARBLAZER

FANTASY FICTION IN PICTURES No. 259

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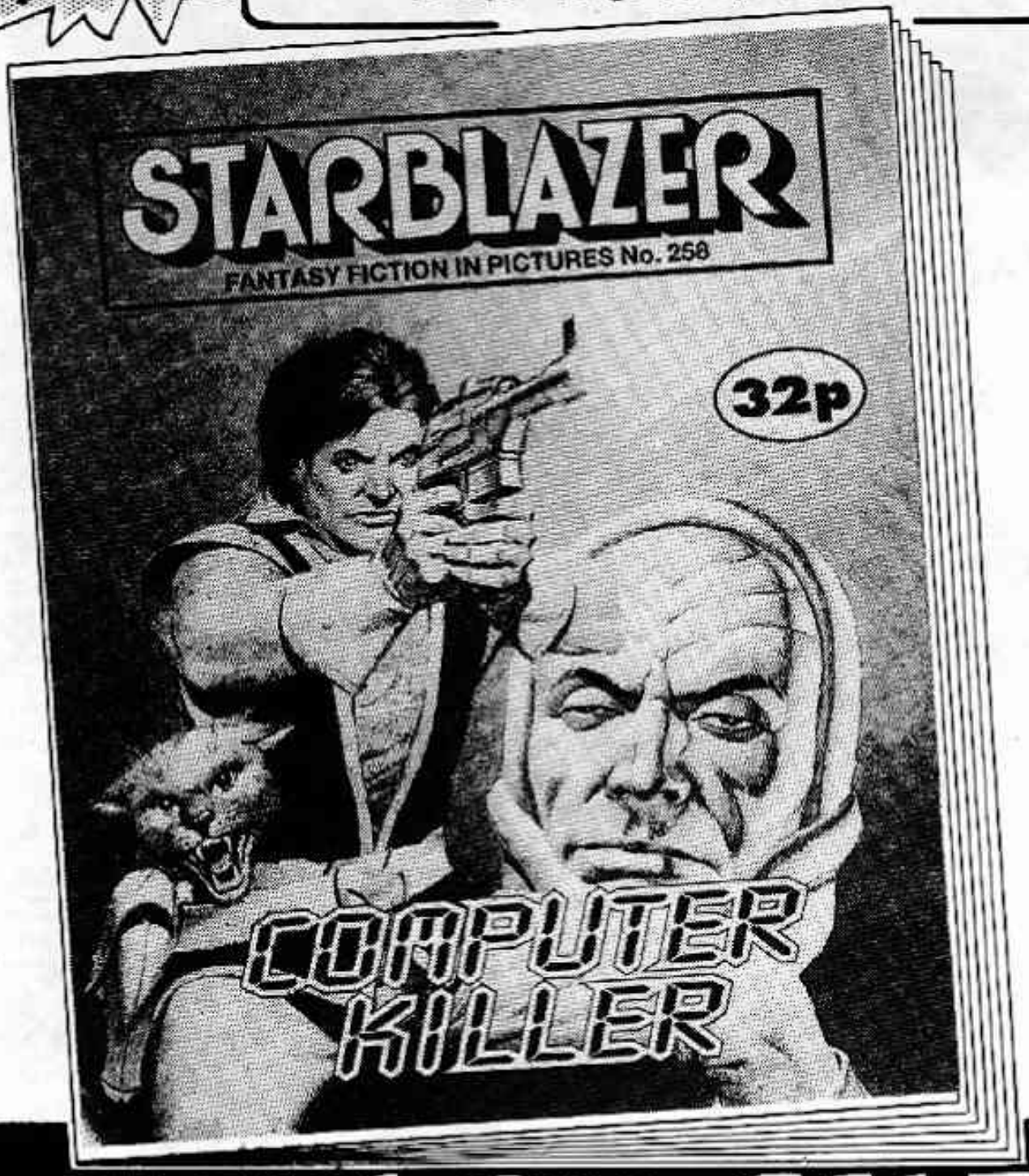
DARK DYNASTY

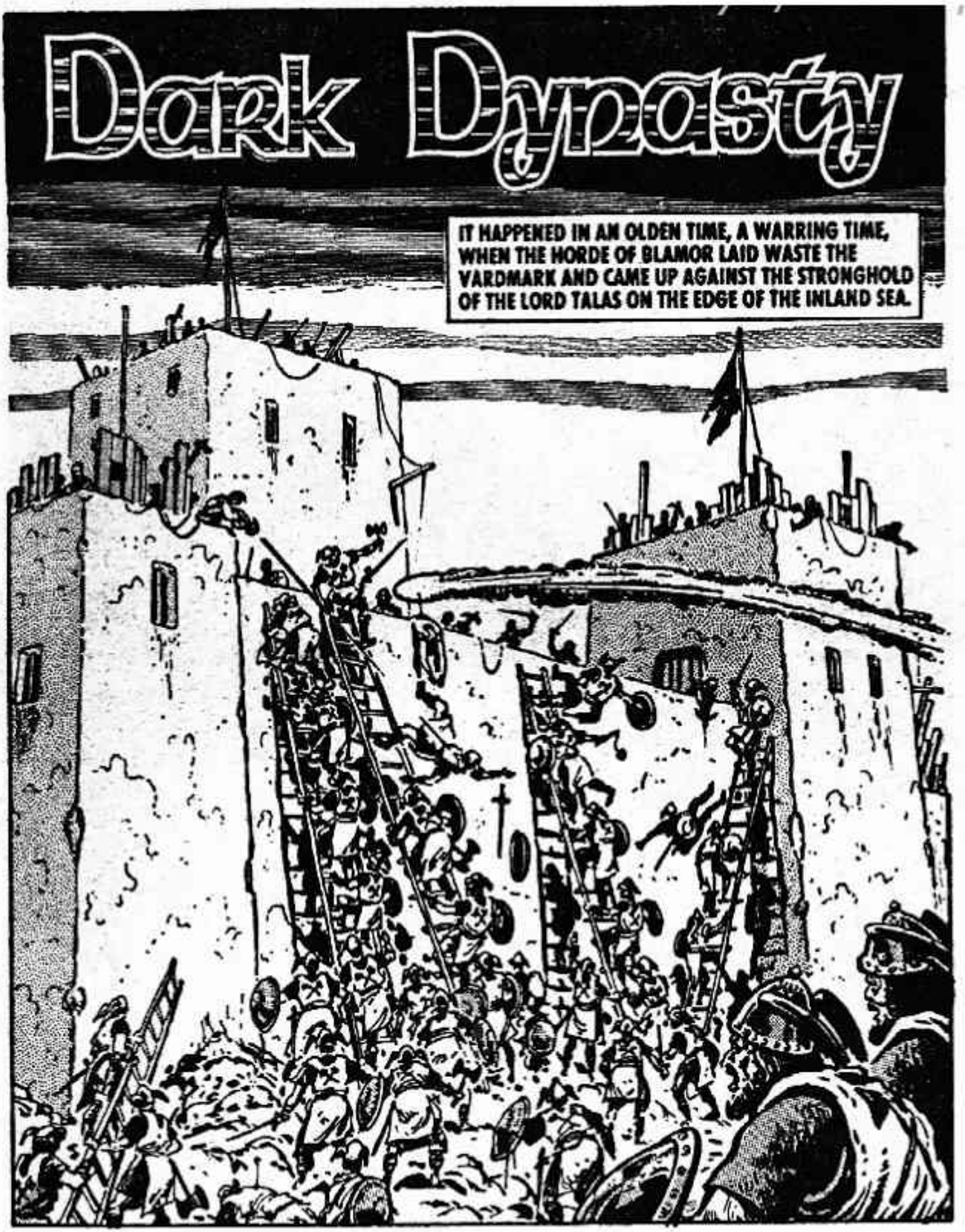
DON'T MISS

THIS MONTH'S OTHER ACTION-PACKED ADVENTURE

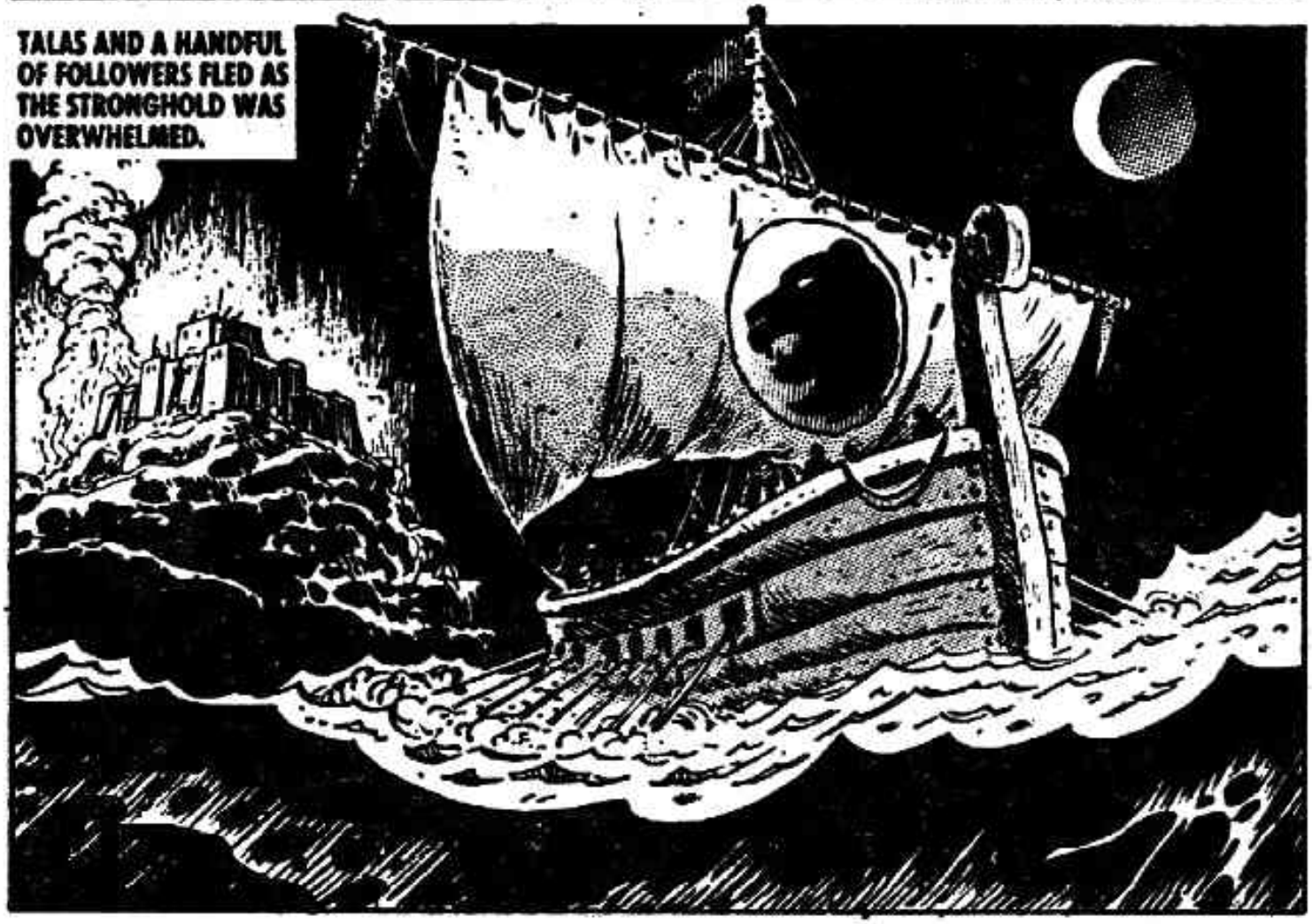


NOW ON SALE

Dark Dynasty



LORD TALAS, WE HOLD THE WATERGATE, BUT THE DOGS PRESS HARD. YOUR WIFE AND SONS ARE ABOARD THE GALLEY.

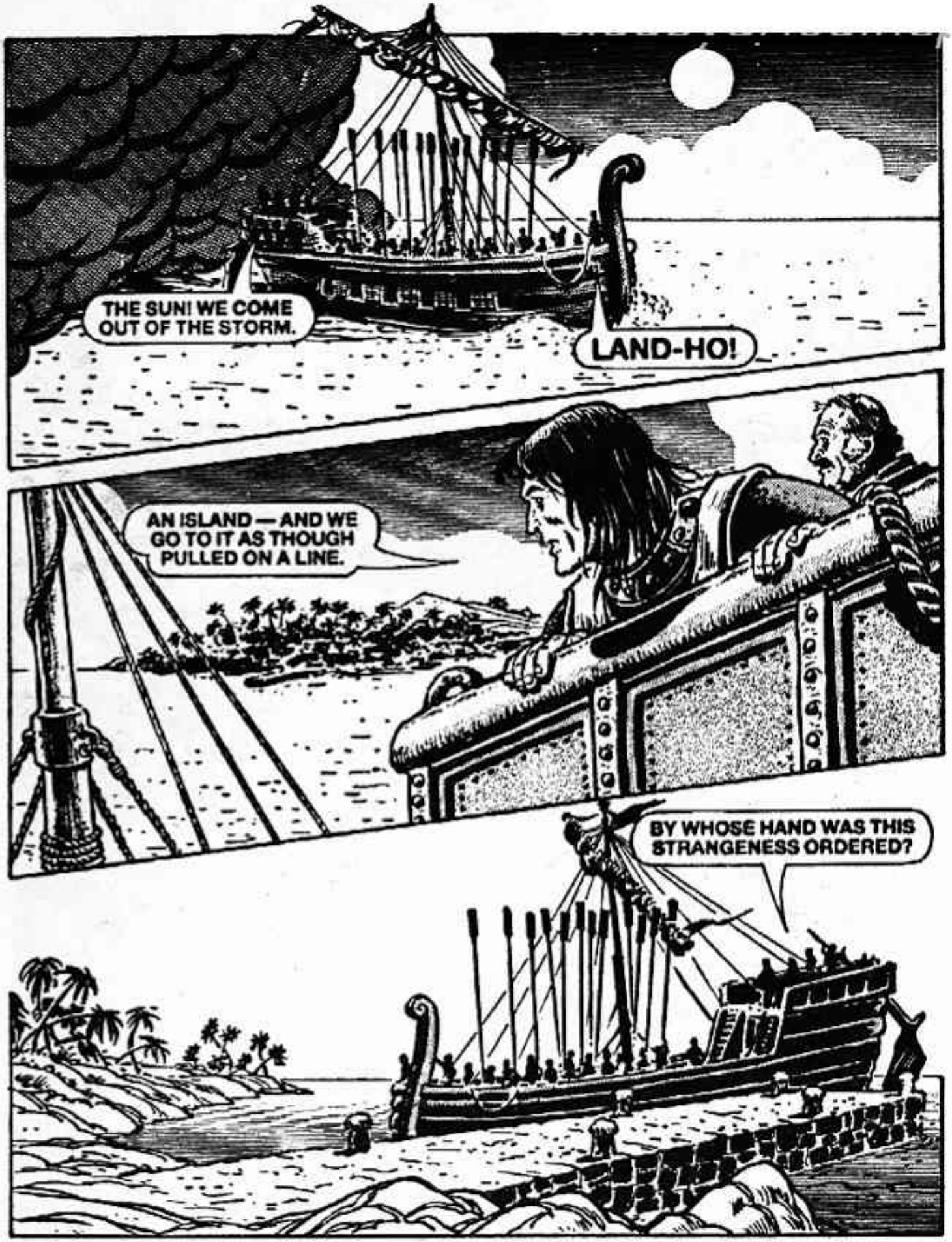

TALAS AND A HANDFUL OF FOLLOWERS FLED AS THE STRONGHOLD WAS OVERWHELMED.

AT LEAST YOUR SONS LIVE, MY LORD.
AYE, BUT FOR WHAT? THEY LOOK TO INHERIT A TAKEN LAND, ITS PEOPLE DEAD, SCATTERED OR ENSLAVED.

CAME ANOTHER MORNING.
LORD, THE SHIP DOES NOT STEER! SHE RUNS A TRUE LINE, BUT NOT BY MY DIRECTING.
TRY AGAIN. SHIP THE STARBOARD OARS AND HAUL ON THE LARBOARD BANK.

YOU SEE, LORD. SHE DOES NOT TURN. ON SHE FLIES.

LOOK!
A STORM CLOUD BLACK AS PITCH — AND WE GO STRAIGHT TO IT.
THE GALLEY RACED INTO A FURY OF WIND AND WAVE.


THE SUN! WE COME OUT OF THE STORM.
LAND-HO!
AN ISLAND — AND WE GO TO IT AS THOUGH PULLED ON A LINE.
BY WHOSE HAND WAS THIS STRANGENESS ORDERED?

THE ARRIVAL WAS WATCHED.
HE COMES, MY FATHER.
MY FATHER, DO YOU NOT HEAR? YOUR DAUGHTER SPEAKS.
I HEAR YOU.

YES, I HEAR YOU, TORMENTING BRAT. SO YOU WOULD GO ON WITH YOUR STUPID PRANK.
IT IS NO PRANK!
WAS IT FOR THIS I PASSED TO YOU THE KNOWLEDGE THAT RAISED YOU ABOVE MERE HUMAN LEVEL?
FATHER DEAR, YOU DID SO TO PLEASE YOUR VANITY. YOU TOSSED ME SCRAPS FROM YOUR BOARD OF LEARNING, BUT I TOOK THE WHOLE WHEN YOUR FOOLISHNESS ALLOWED ME TO TRICK YOU INTO CAPTIVITY IN THE RING OF NETHERFLAME.

CHILD, AT LEAST ALLOW ME TO RENEW MY YOUTH. THIS DECAYING OLD BODY IS AN UNCOMFORTABLE DWELLING.
PERHAPS, DEAR FATHER — IN ANOTHER HALF CENTURY OR SO.
FOR NOW — FAREWELL. I HAVE MUCH TO DO.
TALAS AND HIS PEOPLE CAME CAUTIOUSLY ASHORE.
WE APPEAR TO BE EXPECTED.
A TRAP, LORD. THAT TEMPTING FOOD IS POISONED.

WIFE, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
WHOEVER BROUGHT US HERE DID NOT DO SO TO KILL US.

THE WIFE OF TALAS LIVED — AND THE REST ATE.
HE IS THE MAN FOR ME! FIRST I MUST BE RID OF THAT WOMAN.

WHAT IS THIS? THEY ALL SLEEP!
I AM MELANA THE SORCERESS. I KNOW YOU FOR A GREAT LORD WHO LOST HIS LAND AND A GREAT WARRIOR WHO LACKS AN ARMY. I KNOW YOU WOULD PAY A HIGH PRICE TO HAVE BOTH.
THEY SLEEP THAT WE MAY SPEAK. COME TO ME, LORD TALAS.
WHO ARE YOU, AND WHAT DO YOU WISH ME FOR?
THAT IS TRUE. NO PRICE WOULD BE TOO HIGH.

TALAS, I HAVE GREAT POWER! MAKE ME YOUR CONSORT AND YOU SHALL HAVE WHAT YOU LACK. THAT IS THE PRICE — MYSELF AS YOUR ONLY WIFE!
OH NO, I CANNOT. IS IT NOT ENOUGH THAT I SIMPLY PUT ASIDE THE MOTHER OF MY SONS?
NO — IT IS NOT ENOUGH. CHOOSE, TALAS — CHOOSE.
HOLD . . . POWER AND PRESTIGE ARE TEMPTING. IT SHALL BE DONE.

THERE SHE IS. GO TO IT.
LADY, I GO — BUT I WARN YOU THAT YOU HAD BETTER DELIVER WHAT YOU PROMISE.

LORD, I AWOKE AND YOU WERE GONE.
NOW YOU HAVE FOUND ME, MY LADY ANWEN, PUT DOWN OUR SONS AND LET US WALK.

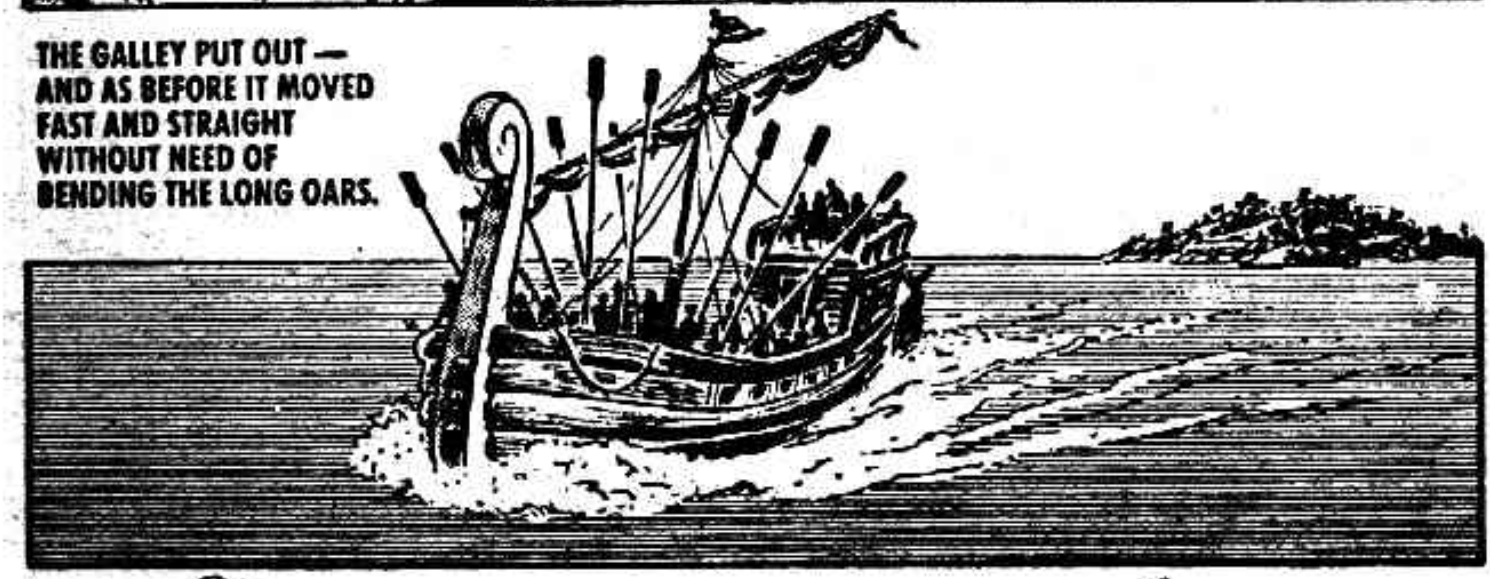
MY LORD, WHY DO YOU LOOK AT ME SO?
ANWEN, MY WIFE, WHAT YOU SEE IN MY EYES IS THE PAIN I FEEL AT WHAT MUST BE DONE.
DO IT! DO IT!
GOODBYE, MY WIFE!

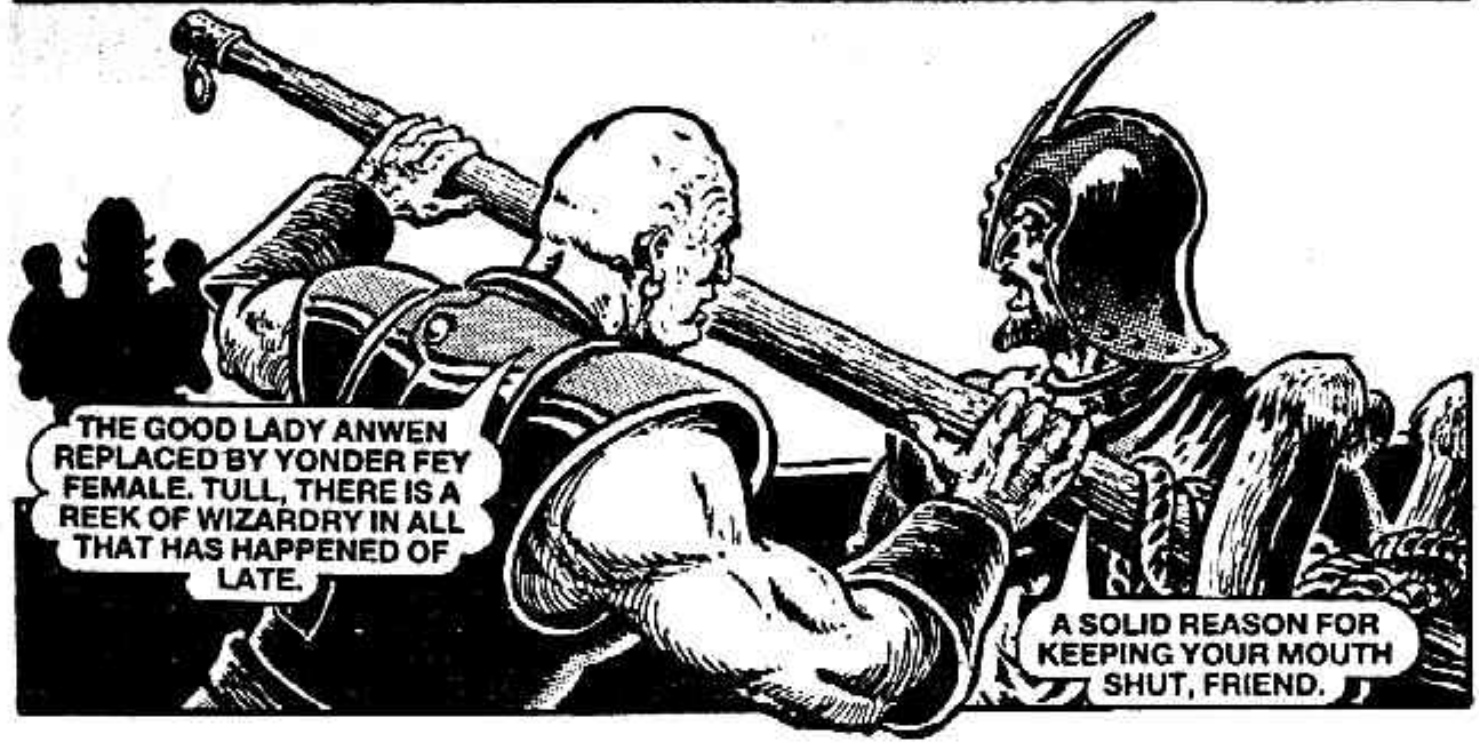
I HAVE DONE MY PART.
NOW I CLEAR WHAT REMAINS OF MY RIVAL.
LIGHTNING FLASHED— AND STRUCK.

THERE IS A STRONG SPIRIT IN THAT ONE.
NOW THESE SHALL BE MINE. THEY SHALL BECOME AN EXTENSION OF MY MIND AND WILL.

AWAKENING CAME TO THE PEOPLE OF TALAS.
I PRESENT SHE WHO IS NOW MY LADY. NOW GET YOU ALL TO THE GALLEY AND MAKE READY FOR DEPARTURE.
IF YOU SAY SO, LORD.
SO YOU GO TO SHARE IN THE BRIEF FLICKERING LIVES OF HUMANS. SUCH STUPIDITY, DAUGHTER.
IT IS MORE STUPID TO HAVE POWER AND NONE ON WHOM TO EXERCISE IT. YES, FATHER, I GO, BUT I LEAVE YOU WITH THAT WHICH WILL REMIND YOU OF ME.
A MEMORY OF MY WARM REGARD, DEAR PARENT.
EHRGH!!

eldubya/iodinepri





THEN FOLLOWED DAYS OF SPEEDY SAILING OVER A FLAT CALM.
MY FASTNESS OF VARDMARK. I AM HOME.
LORD, YOU ALSO ARE WATCHED.
WATCHDOGS OF BLAMOR! LADY, THEY WILL FETCH THE HORDE UPON US AND AS YET I LACK THE ARMY YOU PROMISED.
YOU WILL HAVE YOUR ARMY, MY HUSBAND. NOW SHOW YOUR BRIDE HER NEW HOME.

A HOME IN NEED OF MUCH REFURBISHMENT, HUSBAND.
MEANWHILE A PAVILION ON YON GRASSY KNOLL WILL SUFFICE.
WITCHERY! SHE CONJURES IT FROM EMPTY AIR.

WHAT SAID YOU, SIR TULL?
NOTHING, MY LADY. NOT I. NOT A WORD.

TALAS FOLLOWED HIS NEW WIFE INTO THE CONJURED PAVILION.
YOU ARE UNWISE TO ENTER WITHOUT MY PERMISSION.
WOMAN, YOU FORGET TO WHOM YOU SPEAK. I AM THE MASTER HERE.

I AM ALSO YOUR HUSBAND.
SO YOU ARE, MY DEAR ONE — BUT HAVE A CARE.

HE WHO TOUCHES FIRE SHOULD EXPECT TO BE BURNED.
AAA-RGH!
NOW A LITTLE GAME OF LEARNING, MY SONS. LOOK AT MY HANDS! EMPTY, ARE THEY NOT?

BEHOLD — EMPTY NO LONGER. SMALL KYNON, I SEE YOU WILL LEARN BETTER THAN YOUR SURLY BROTHER.
NIGHT SETTLED.
THE HORDE, LORD?
AYE, TULL, THE LIGHTS OF ITS FIRES. WE MAY EXPECT THE ASSAULT AT DAWN.

HUSBAND, WHY WAIT TO BE ATTACKED? WHY DO YOU NOT ATTACK?
MY HANDFUL AGAINST THAT MASS! LADY, I NEED THE ARMY YOU KEEP PROMISING.
LIGHTNING FLASHED.
ONLY AN ARMY? YOU MAY HAVE AN ARMY.
THE FLASH FORKED INTO A MYRIAD FIERY BRANCHES.

LOOK, MY LORD — LOOK! DEAD MEN MOVE.
HUSBAND, DO NOT SAY YOU FEAR YOUR OWN ARMY.
WOMAN, THIS I DID NOT EXPECT — NOT AN ARMY OF WALKING DEAD.

THE DEAD MEN FOLLOWED.
SEND THEM AWAY.
DO YOU NOT LIKE THEM? PERHAPS IT IS THEIR LOOKS. I ADMIT THEY ARE NOT PLEASING TO THE DISCERNING EYE.

LIGHTNING FLASHED AGAIN.
LET WOUNDS CLOSE, BROKEN BONES MEND AND GARB WITH FLESH — HEAL AND CONCEAL.
SUCH COMELY FELLOWS NOW, HUSBAND — AND THE BEST KIND OF SOLDIERS, OBEYING WITHOUT QUESTION, UNFEARING AND IMPOSSIBLE TO KILL SINCE THEY ARE ALREADY SLAIN.
LADY, YOU HAD BETTER BE RIGHT OR WE ALL PERISH.

eldubya/jedinori

THE HORDE HORSEMEN CHARGED
AGAINST THE DEAD MEN'S SPEARS —

— AND BROKE.

MORE NEWS CAME TO BLAMOR.
LORD, THEY CLOSE ON THE CAMP. THERE IS NO STOPPING THEM. THEY SLICE THROUGH OUR BEST LIKE A KNIFE THROUGH CHEESE.
THEN PULL BACK OUR MEN. USE BOWMEN AND FIREBALLS.
THE ATTACKING FORCE WAS ASSAILED BY A DEADLY BARRAGE.
POUR IT IN, MY LADS. HOT AND FAST.
LORD BLAMOR, STILL THEY COME ON. NOTHING STOPS THEM.

FLEE, MY LORD — SAVE YOURSELF. THESE ARE NOT MORTAL MEN.
AYE, I'LL GO, BUT THAT CURSED TALAS WILL SEE ME AGAIN. I'LL HAVE MY REVENGE ON HIM.
DAWN CAME TO A QUIET FIELD OF BATTLE.
SO MANY DEAD, TULL — SO MANY MORE RECRUITS TO MY SERVICE WHEN THE LADY MELANA HAS WORKED HER ARTS ON THEM. THIS IS BUT THE START. THE WHOLE OF MIDDLE WORLD SHALL KNOW MY POWER.

TALAS WAS PROVED CORRECT IN THE FIFTEEN YEARS THAT FOLLOWED AS HE LED LEGIONS OF THE WALKING DEAD IN A TIDE OF CONQUEST.

. . . WHILE THE LADY MELANA REIGNED OVER THE STRONGHOLD OF VARDMARK, NEVER SEEMING TO AGE AS HER STEPSONS GREW TALL AND STRONG.
A CLEVER TRICK, RULF. KYNON IS AT YOUR MERCY — OR IS HE?
BROTHER, I OFFER QUARTER IF YOU SURRENDER.
DEAR BROTHER, I NEVER SURRENDER EVEN IN PLAY. RUN ME THROUGH IF YOU MUST — IF YOU CAN.

RULF'S SWORD WAS SUDDENLY ALIVE —
A SERPENT! KYNON, CAN YOU NOT WIN WITHOUT YOUR SORCERY?
RULF, WHY BLAME ME IF I MAKE USE OF THAT WHICH YOU SCORN?
YOUR BROTHER DISAPPOINTS ME, DEAR KYNON. YOU ARE EAGER FOR THE SCRAPS OF GREATER KNOWLEDGE WHICH I FEED YOU, BUT HE IS NOT FITTED FOR THE ROLE I WOULD HAVE HAD HIM SHARE WITH YOU.
JUST AS WELL PERHAPS, DEAREST MOTHER. YOU KNOW HOW I HATE SHARING.
THAT NIGHT RULF HAD A DREAM.
AWAKEN, MY SON. GUARD YOURSELF.

GUARD YOURSELF.
A DREAM BECOME NIGHTMARE! NO, I AM AWAKE — THAT IS REAL.
RULF MOVED SWIFTLY — JUST IN TIME.

FOUL MONSTER — PERISH!
DEAR MOTHER, IS THIS WHY YOU SUMMONED ME — TO SEE RULF SLAY AN OVERSIZED INSECT?
RULF SHOULD HAVE BEEN SLAIN, MY SON. HIS TIME HAS COME. NOW LOOK AGAIN INTO THE CRYSTAL AND YOU WILL SEE WHAT HAPPENED IN THE DAY THAT HAS JUST ENDED.
LORD TALAS HAD MADE ENTRY INTO A CONQUERED TOWN.
ALMS, GREAT LORD — ALMS FOR A POOR MAN.
OUT OF MY WAY, YOU SCURVY RASCAL.

YOU WILL NOT GIVE, BUT I SHALL — I, BLAMOR, ONCE LORD OF THE HORDE.
TALAS HAS HIS DEATH-WOUND. EVEN NOW HE IS BEING CARRIED HOME. ONLY YOU ARE FIT TO SUCCEED HIM — WHICH IS WHY YOUR BROTHER RULF MUST PERISH.

DEAR MOTHER, LET SOME OTHER DISPOSAL BE MADE OF RULF. IT MAY BE A WEAKNESS IN ME, BUT I HAVE A FONDNESS FOR THE BLOCKHEAD.
I SHALL THINK ON IT, DEAR SON.
LORD TALAS CAME HOME.
MY SONS! LET FIRE CONSUME MY REMAINS. EVEN THE LADY MELANA MAY NOT BE ABLE TO DO ANY RAISING OF ASH.
FATHER, YOU HAVE OUR PLEDGE.

AND WITH THOSE WORDS, TALAS DIED —
SO PASSES OUR FATHER. NOW KYNON AND I BECOME LORDS OF THE VARDMARK.
NAY, RULF. THERE IS ROOM FOR ONLY ONE LORD.

MELANA FROZE RULF WITH A TOUCH —
WHICH IS NOT YOU, MY BROTHER.

RULF AWOKE — IN CHAINS.

TO YOUR DUTY, DOG. TAKE UP YOUR OAR.

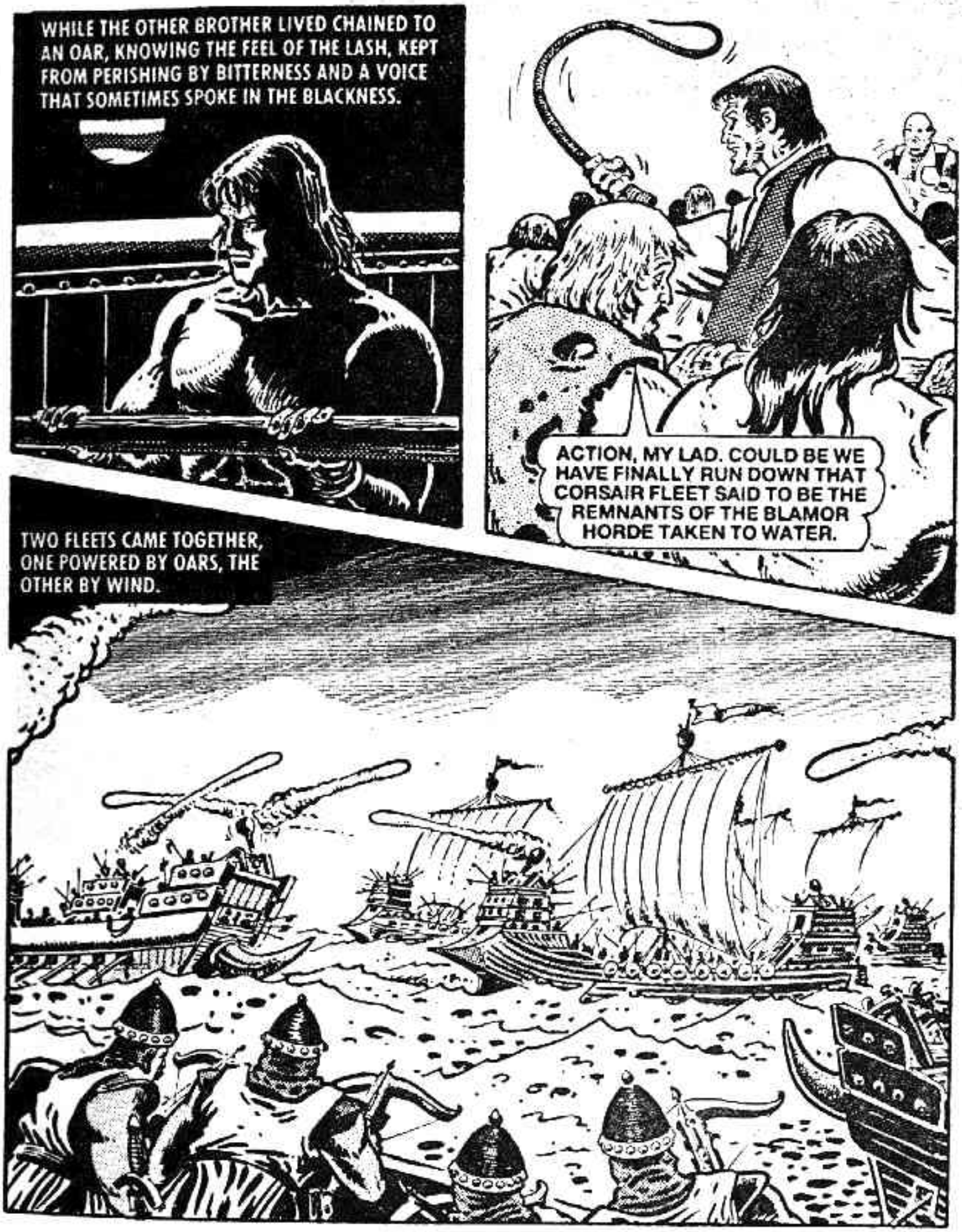
A SLAVE GALLEY! AH, THAT MY MOTHER COULD DO THIS TO ME.

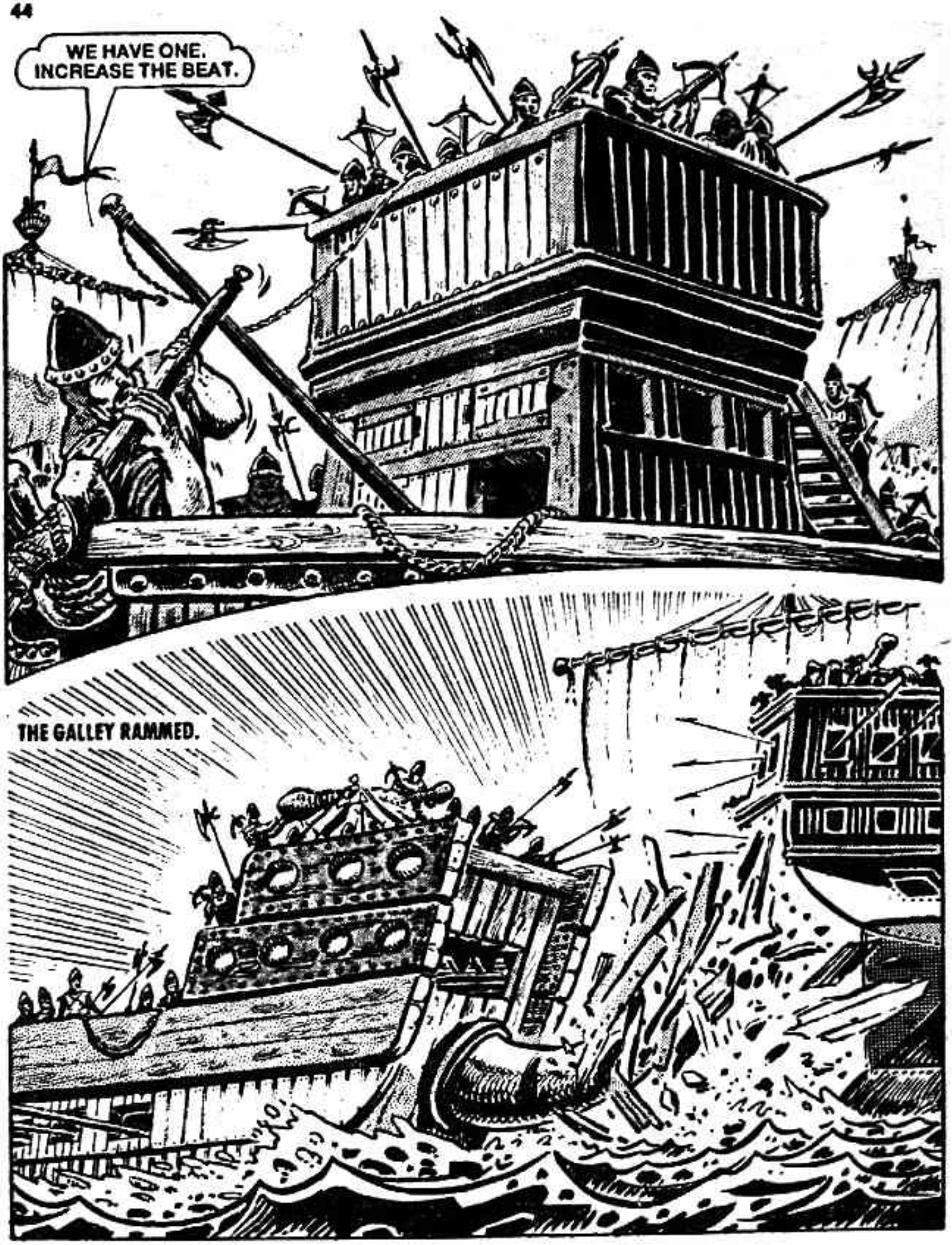
SHE IS NOT YOUR TRUE MOTHER, PRINCELING. AYE, I KNOW YOU. I AM TULL, A SERVANT OF YOUR FATHER UNTIL I CAUSED OFFENCE TO THAT HAGWOMAN.

LIVING DEAD WOULD NOT FEEL THE LASH. ARE THEY ALL TRUE LIVING WHO PULL THESE OARS?

AYE, LAD, SEEMS TO ME THE HAG NEEDS SOME OF US AROUND TO SATE HER POWER CRAZE — OTHERWISE IT WOULD BE LIKE RULING WOODEN TOYS.

GOOD TULL, TELL ME WHAT YOU KNOW OF MY MOTHER.
OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS THE BROTHERS LIVED LIVES MUCH DIFFERENT, THE ONE TAKING OVER THE ARMIES OF THE DEAD FATHER AND EXTENDING HIS CONQUERING RULE OVER OTHER LANDS.


WHILE THE OTHER BROTHER LIVED CHAINED TO AN OAR, KNOWING THE FEEL OF THE LASH, KEPT FROM PERISHING BY BITTERNESS AND A VOICE THAT SOMETIMES SPOKE IN THE BLACKNESS.
ACTION, MY LAD. COULD BE WE HAVE FINALLY RUN DOWN THAT CORSAIR FLEET SAID TO BE THE REMNANTS OF THE BLAMOR HORDE TAKEN TO WATER.
TWO FLEETS CAME TOGETHER, ONE POWERED BY OARS, THE OTHER BY WIND.


WE HAVE ONE. INCREASE THE BEAT.
THE GALLEY RAMMED.

BRACE YOURSELF, LAD. THAT WINDSHIP COMES FOR US.
THE GALLEY WAS STRUCK.
WE ARE BREACHED!

RULF FOUND HIMSELF UNDERWATER.
TAKE THE SWORD, MY SON.
THAT FACE AGAIN — THE VOICE THAT CALLS ME HER SON. SWORD! WHAT SWORD?
THIS SWORD. NOW I UNDERSTAND.
AH — IT COMES FREE!

RULF AND HIS BENCH COMPANION ROSE FREE AS THE WRECKAGE SANK.
TULL, HOLD ON.
NEVER THOUGHT I'D BE SO GLAD TO GET MY HANDS ON AN OAR.

THE BATTLE HAD MOVED ON AND DURING THE REST OF A LONG DAY THE FLOTSAM OF THE SINKING SPREAD WIDE OVER THE SEA.
WE ARE IN FOR ROUGH WEATHER, LAD.

LAD — HELP ME.
I HAVE YOU, OLD FRIEND.

MORNING BROUGHT A CALMING OF STORM FURY.
LAND! WE ARE SAVED.

IT LOOKS TO BE AN ISLAND.
ONE I HAVE SEEN BEFORE. AN ISLAND PLEASANT OF ASPECT IS WHAT YOUR FATHER SAID ABOUT IT.
THE LADY OF MY DREAMS! SHE IS THERE. SHE BECKONS.
I SEE HER NOT. IT MAY BE THAT THE SUN DAZZLES ME.

SHE WOULD HAVE US ENTER YONDER CAVE.
THE CAVE I DO SEE.

MY SON, I BRING YOU TO ONE WHO MAY BE OF HELP.
NOW I SEE ROCK PARTING AND GIVING OUT SMOKE.

FIERY DEPTHS APPEARED.
YOU AGAIN! THAT TROUBLED SPIRIT HELD EARTHBOUND BY POWER OF WILL.
IT IS I — AND MY SON. GREAT NASUS, KNOW YOU ANY MEANS OF DEFEATING YOUR WITCH DAUGHTER?

DEFEAT IS POSSIBLE ONLY WITH HER DESTRUCTION — AND ONE BECOME IMMORTAL IS NOT EASILY DESTROYED. THE ONLY SURE MEANS IS BY USE OF A WEAPON STEEPED IN NETHERFLAME. IT IS A WAY OF HAZARD TO MORTALS.

SHOW ME THAT WAY. SHOW ME.
IT LAYS AHEAD OF YOU. ADVANCE INTO THE VOID.

LADY, AN ANSWER BEFORE I GO. ARE YOU MY TRUE MOTHER?
I AM SHE, MY SON — ANWEN WHO WAS MURDERED. NOW TAKE CARE. YOU GO INTO DEPTHS WHERE I CANNOT REACH TO HELP YOU.

ANOTHER STEP — AND RULF WAS FALLING.

RULF'S FALL WAS HALTED —
URGH! COBWEB! I SHOULD BE GRATEFUL IT BROKE MY FALL.

TULL! YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE COME.
MAYBE SO, LAD. I GET THESE FOOLISH NOTIONS.
LOOK WHAT COMES.
LAD, WE SHOULD THINK ABOUT GOING.

NOW I KNOW WHY FLIES ARE UNCOMFORTABLE IN SUCH PLACES.

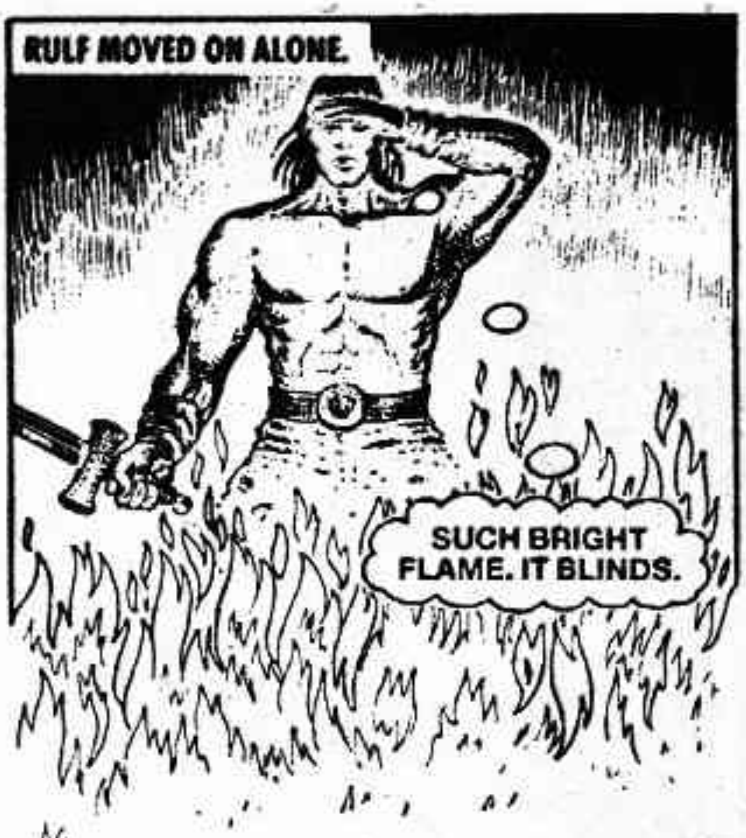
LIGHT! COULD IT BE THE NETHERFLAME?
THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY OF FINDING OUT.

THEY MOVED ABOVE A BLACK ABYSS . . .

. . . TO A SUDDEN CONFRONTATION.
LIVING DEAD.
DOUBTLESS THE HAZARD OF WHICH NASUS SPOKE.
HOW CAN THE DEAD BE SLAIN?
THAT IS A PROBLEM, LAD.

BACK, TULL. GIVE ME SPACE.
JUST HOLD HIM, LAD. I HAVE A BETTER NOTION.
I HAVE HIM! NOW LET GO, LAD. LET GO!

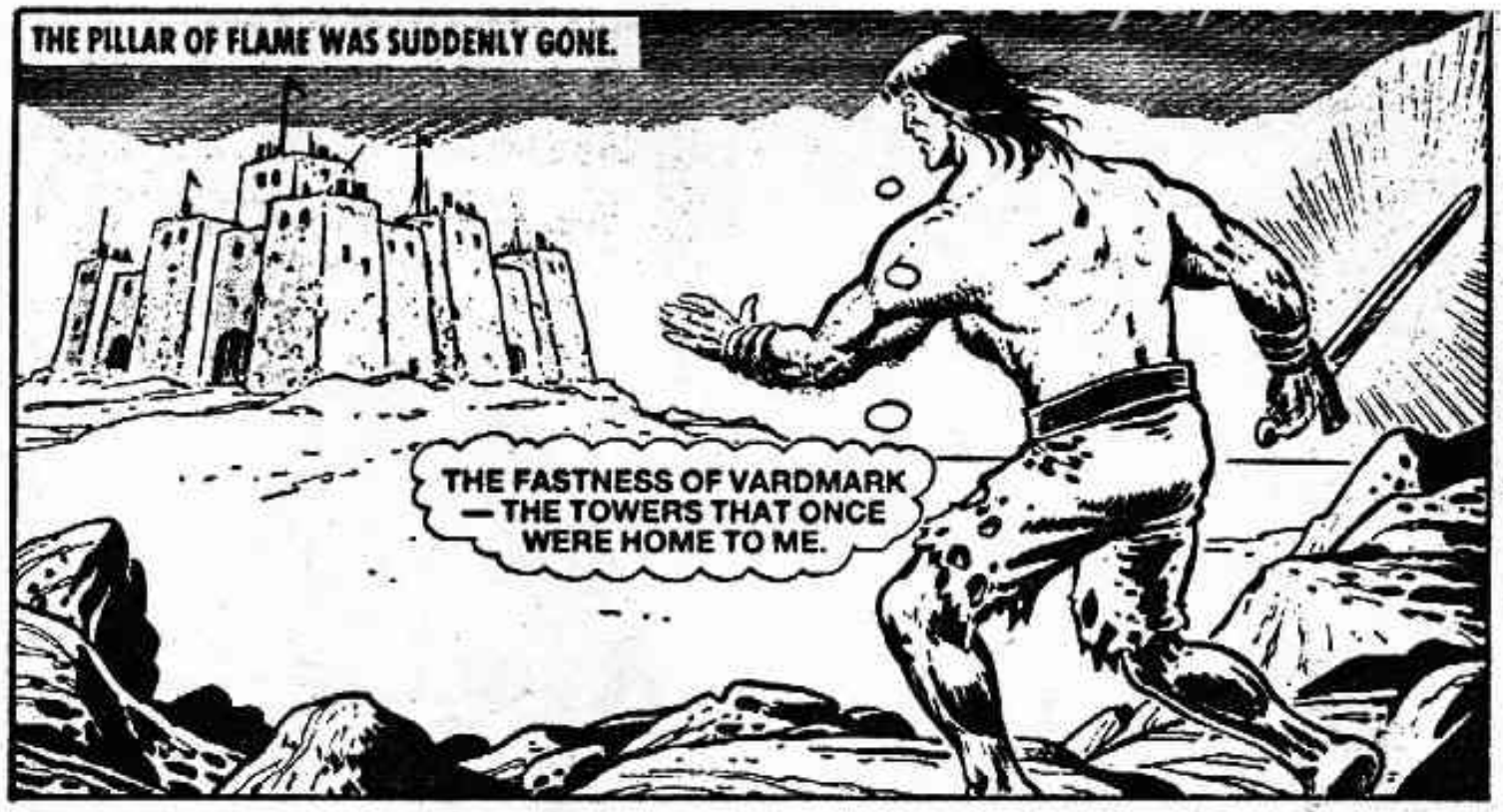
TULL PUSHED WITH ALL HIS MIGHT —
GO ON, LAD. FAREWELL!
TULL!


RULF MOVED ON ALONE.
SUCH BRIGHT FLAME. IT BLINDS.

THE FINAL HAZARD IS FEAR. THE WEAPON MUST BE STEEPED WHILST GRIPPED BY HE WHO WOULD USE IT. YOU MUST ENTER THE FLAME.
ENTER THAT GLARE — THE HEAT! SURELY I WOULD PERISH.

SO I PERISH.

NAY — I LIVE. I FEEL HEAT, BUT THERE IS NO HURT OR PAIN.


THE PILLAR OF FLAME WAS SUDDENLY GONE.
THE FASTNESS OF VARDMARK — THE TOWERS THAT ONCE WERE HOME TO ME.

MOTHER!
YES, MY SON. I AM COME TO SHOW YOU THE WAY.

RULF FOLLOWED.
I KNOW THESE PEOPLE — YET THEY IGNORE ME.
WE ARE CONCEALED FROM THEIR EYES.

WE ARE CONCEALED ALSO FROM THE DEAD EYES OF THESE LIVING DEAD.

FROM HERE YOU GO ON ALONE. MY SON. BE STRONG. YOU ARE UP AGAINST A TERRIBLE POWER.

RULF CLIMBED HIGHER INTO THE TOWER.
I SEE HER — AND MY BROTHER KYNON. I WOULD NOT WISH TO SLAY HIM, BUT HE SHARES HER FOULNESS.
MOTHER, WE HAVE A VISITOR. AYE, AND ONE WE KNOW — MY BLOCKHEAD OF A BROTHER GROWN TO MANSIZE.
I SEE HIM. I SEE A SPARROW WHO WOULD BE AN EAGLE.

A GREAT FORCE OF WIND BLEW AGAINST RULF.
I SEE MY FATHER BEHIND SUCH INSOLENCE. IT IS TIME I WARMED HIM WITH A DAUGHTERLY VISIT.
YOU USE FORCE ENOUGH TO BLOW HIM INTO THE VAULT OF THE SKY — YET STILL HE COMES. DEAR MOTHER, YOU WEAKEN.
THIS COULD BE A GOOD TIME TO SETTLE WHO RULES HERE.
AAAAAAH!

RULF FELT AN EASING OF THE TERRIBLE PRESSURE.
CURSED INGRATE! YOU WOULD USE ON ME A LITTLE OF THE POWER I GIVE YOU.
FOR THAT YOU PERISH!
THE DISTRACTION GAVE OPPORTUNITY TO RULF.
OH INSOLENCE — INSOLENCE.

THIS IS WRONG. THIS CANNOT BE HAPPENING TO ME.
RULF WAS SUDDENLY ALONE . . .
SHE IS DESTROYED — AND MY BROTHER. IN THE END HE HELPED ME EVEN IF IT WAS FOR HIS OWN PURPOSE.

. . . AND NOT ALONE.
EVIL ENDS WITH MY WRETCHED OFFSPRING. YOUNG FELLOW I AM OBLIGED TO YOU FOR MY RELEASE. CALL ON ME IF EVER YOU NEED MY HELP
SIR, I WOULD PREFER TO MANAGE WITHOUT IT. I ASK THAT YOU AND YOUR OUTWORLD KIND LEAVE US ORDINARY MORTALS ALONE

IT IS AS WELL. YOUR AND MY KIND ARE DESTINED TO GROW EVERY FURTHER APART WITH THE AGEING OF THIS SMALL WORLD. SO GOODBYE, MORTAL ONE.

FINALLY ALONE, RULF WALKED THE FASTNESS OF VARDMARK AND SAW EVIDENCE OF THE END OF THE POWER OF MELANA.

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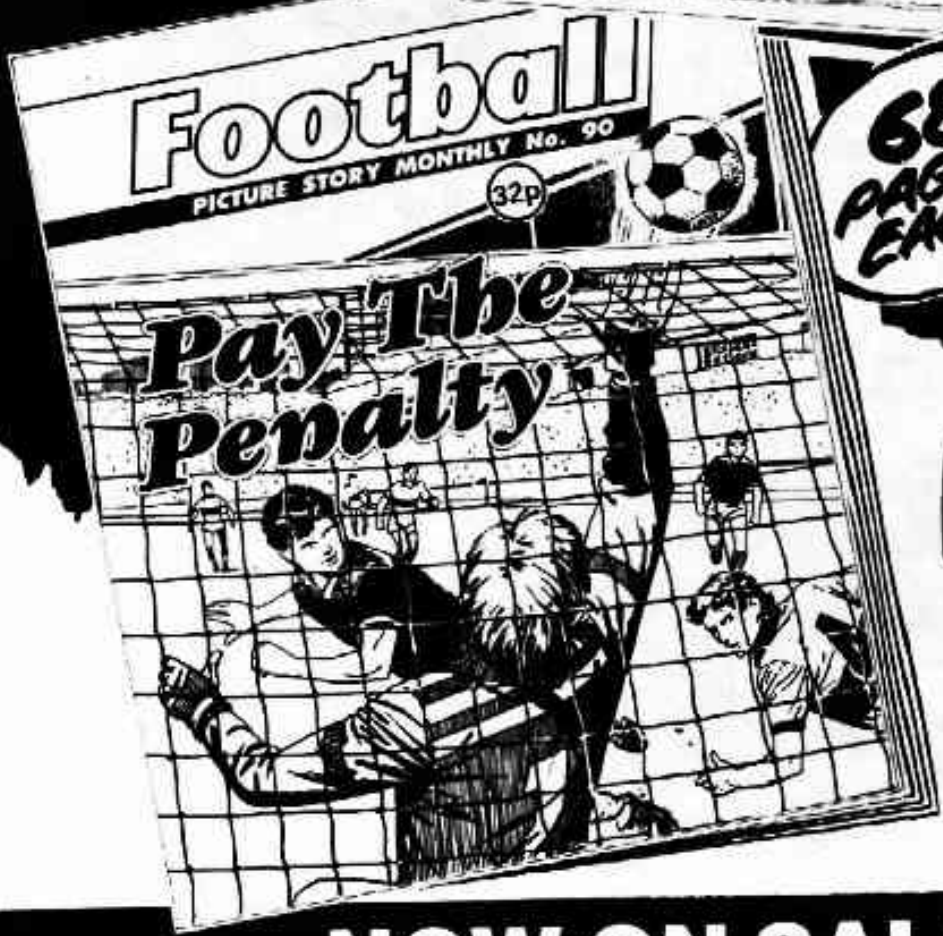
IF YOU'RE A FOOTBALL FAN, YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO MISS THESE!



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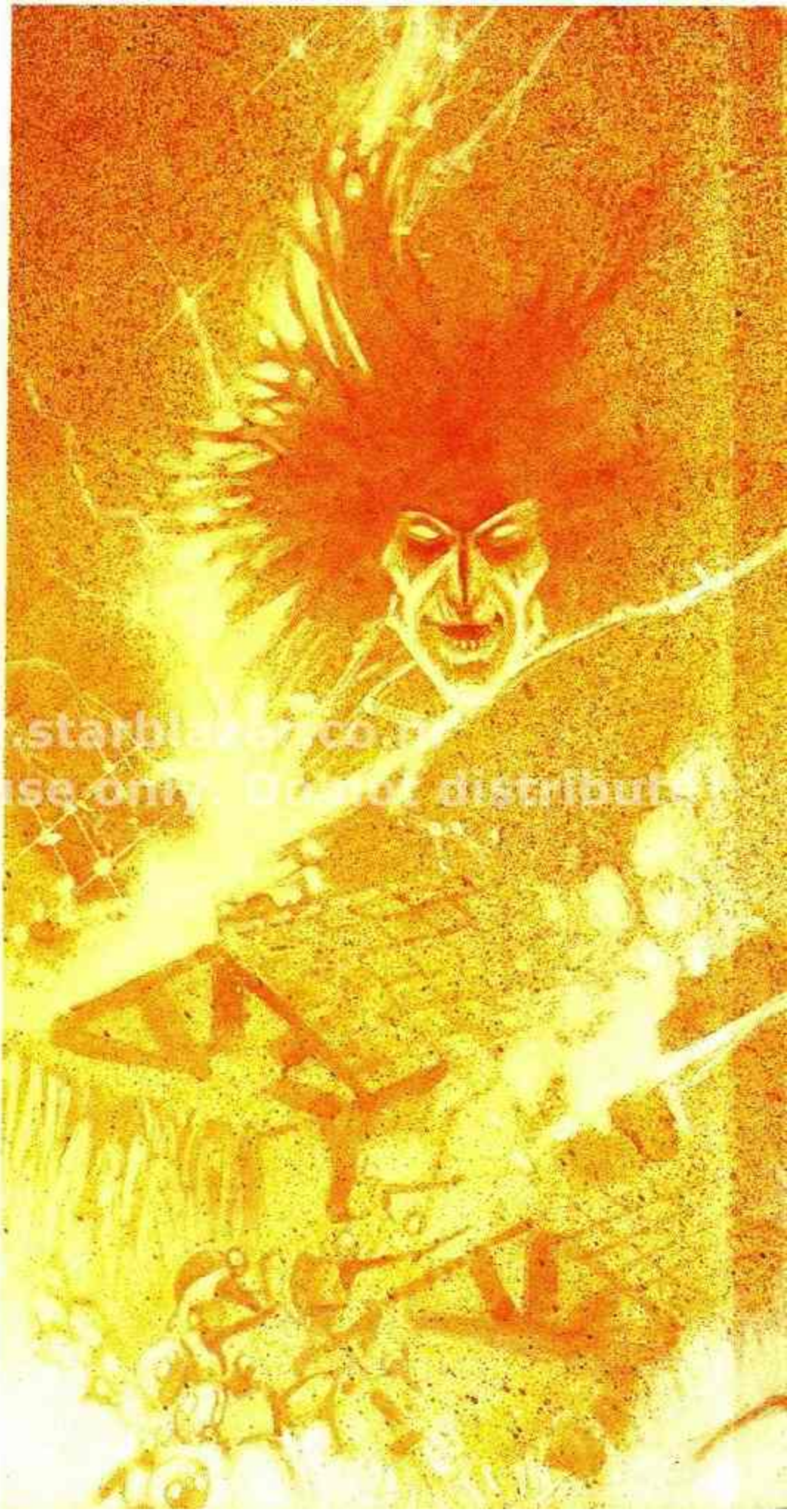
The Powers of Darkness are always on the prowl for those willing to sell their souls. But the price for wealth and power is enormous. In the case of Lord Talas, who had lost his lands to the fearsome Horde of Blamor, the price was one life — that of his wife. And it was a price he paid to regain his lands. His twin sons were raised in ignorance of the price, but one day they would find out . . .